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With child-exploitation cases connected to Internet chat rooms growing at a rapid rate, U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk and Judy Biggert held a congressional hearing Monday in Chicago to discuss legislation aimed at curbing predators' use of social Web sites.

In a courtroom at the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse, the Illinois Republicans listened to testimony from suburban law enforcement and school officials about the prevalence of pedophiles on social Web sites commonly used by young people.

"We've spent millions of dollars securing our schools so no one can physically access them," Kirk said. But those efforts go to waste if predators succeed in using the Internet to lure children and teenagers into an assault, Kirk said.

Kirk and Biggert are backing legislation, pending in the House, that would limit access to social Web sites at schools and libraries.

Monday's hearing focused on sites such as MySpace.com, Facebook.com and several others where people post personal profiles and interact through chat rooms.

Students and parents are often unaware of or naive about the dangers lurking on such sites, said Patricia Fix, chief of the cybercrimes unit of the Lake County state's attorney's office.

A call to MySpace requesting comment was not immediately returned Monday.

Chris Kelly, chief privacy officer for Facebook, said the site is constructed to govern what sections users can access based on their e-mail addresses.

For example, people wanting to access a particular high school's section must have a valid e-mail address from that high school, Kelly said.

Fix said a major problem such sites pose is the ability of children to pretend they are older and adults to pretend they are younger.

Naperville Police Detective Rich Wistocki said he recently found a lewd photo that a 5th-grader had posted of herself on MySpace.

Wistocki said he alerted MySpace to the girl's profile, and the site deleted it and the profiles of everyone on her contact list.

Kelly acknowledged that children who misrepresent their age are a problem, albeit rare, on Facebook. The site quickly deletes the profiles of anyone found to be younger than 13, he said.

Fix, Wistocki and two other law enforcement officials who testified also requested that Congress pass laws requiring Internet service providers to maintain records of users' activities for longer periods of time.

Currently, those records are maintained for days when they need to be kept for months, Fix said.